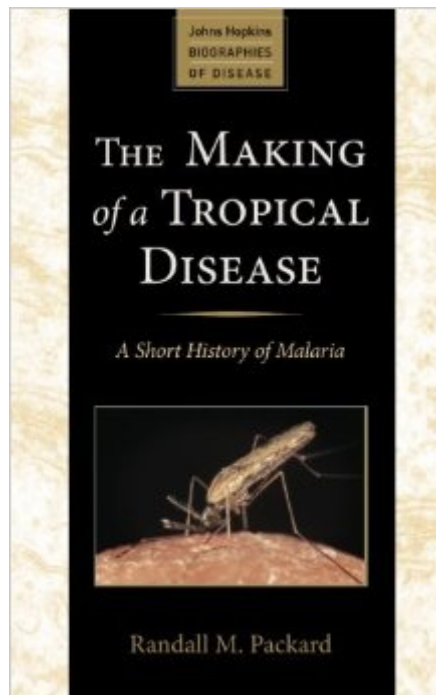


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The Making Of A Tropical Disease: A Short History Of Malaria (Johns Hopkins Biographies Of Disease)



Synopsis

Malaria sickens hundreds of millions of people and kills one to three million each year. Despite massive efforts to eradicate the disease, it remains a major public health problem in poorer tropical regions. But malaria has not always been concentrated in tropical areas. How did other regions control malaria and why does the disease still flourish in some parts of the globe? From Russia to Bengal to Palm Beach, Randall Packard's far-ranging narrative traces the natural and social forces that help malaria spread and make it deadly. He finds that war, land development, crumbling health systems, and globalization coupled with climate change and changes in the distribution and flow of water create conditions in which malaria's carrier mosquitoes thrive. The combination of these forces, Packard contends, makes the tropical regions today a perfect home for the disease. Authoritative, fascinating, and eye-opening, this short history of malaria concludes with policy recommendations for improving control strategies and saving lives.

Book Information

Series: Johns Hopkins Biographies of Disease

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Johns Hopkins University Press; 1 edition (September 12, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 142140396X

ISBN-13: 978-1421403960

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars See all reviews (46 customer reviews)

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Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Clinical > Tropical Medicine #13 in Books > Medical

Books > Medicine > Internal Medicine > Infectious Disease > Tropical Medicine #162 in Books >

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Customer Reviews

Once upon a time there was a mosquito. And this mosquito carried something with her and gave it to everyone she met. Men in peculiar outfits sprayed all over the land, and the mosquito was banished, in that land at least. This is the story of malaria. The story that I've heard. But the actual story of Malaria is a lot more complex. Who would have, for instance, expected a history on a supposed tropical disease to begin with a study of a city in Northern Russia? The Making of a

Tropical Disease does just that. Honestly, this isn't always a fun book to read. Some books are very good about inspiration and motivation and glide along in presenting the chosen perspective. This isn't about inspiration or motivation. It is more ambitious. There are times in which it slows down and gets into details and spends a long time on what might seem a minor point. But, this negative isn't really a criticism. These seemingly minor points are in fact important, and it is the tendency to gloss over such points that undermine so many attempts to respond. This certainly is a well written book. Randall Packard is a very good writer, and even with my above comment I must add he does a wonderful job of making personal connection. In his journey through the history of where malaria spread he does not only relate facts and figures. He tells a story, and in telling that story has written a very, very solid history. But more than a history *The Making of a Tropical Disease* is also really a book on global policy. Packard does not hide this fact. He is making the point that malaria is not simply a story about random mosquitoes who live in unfortunate places. Rather, malaria is a disease that responds to human interaction, and throughout history there is a direct correlation between policy, politics, land use, economics and the occurrence of malaria. Humans interact with this world, and this interaction is not neutral but rather creates changes. These changes can bring open the door to ill effects. This is not simply asserted and then policies recommended that fit some pre-conceived political bias. Rather, Packard is very scientific and very good in his history, laying out clearly the practices and results that led to malaria in certain regions. He respects the use of sources and when making a leap in interpretation or dealing with a situation in which clear records might be sketchy he admits this. His interpretation of data, however, seems solid even when he must depend on inference. Packard is laying an absolutely solid foundation to a holistic policy in regards to malaria, and more than malaria. In a way this is a very post-modern book. The pre-moderns suffered from nature. The moderns sought to conquer nature, overwhelming it. The mass application of DDT resulted. Packard builds a middle ground, arguing that we should neither be victims but nor should we deny our own impact. Instead, by understanding nature, malaria and mosquitoes and land and water and humanity, we can develop intentional policies that reflect the unintentional answers to past malaria outbreaks. This really is an extraordinary book. For those who are interested in diseases it makes for an interesting read. For those who are interested in global politics and policies it pushes beyond the usual responses and builds a solid case for real, lasting and healthy actions that can literally save lives and entire regions from decay. My perspective on malaria was at the same time begun and provoked, leading me to see so much of global realities with a new understanding. Very few books can be considered transformational, but Packard really did transform my thinking. This should be a required book for anyone involved in global studies.

Following the death of Pope Gregory XV in 1623 from what we now know as malaria, the College of Cardinals convened to elect a new pope. Six of their numbers and forty attendants succumbed to the same illness, which was attributed to "bad air" (mala aria in medieval Italian). Malaria is a parasitic disease, spread by anopheles mosquitoes. Malaria is a tropical disease, but outbreaks can occur almost anywhere in the world. Successful parasites do not kill their hosts, which is why malaria has a relatively low mortality rate. Malaria still manages to kill one to three million humans each year, with a total infection rate of 400 to 800 million. Most of those infected suffer from recurrent fevers and chills, with the disease striking down the elderly, newborn and others with weak or compromised immune systems. This history of malaria should serve as a cautionary tale for most of us. Malarial outbreaks can be controlled but never eliminated. When public health systems break down malaria may follow. Outbreaks in Archangel during the Russian Revolution and Civil War, and in contemporary Palm Beach County offer testimony to the opportunistic nature of this infection. This account is sobering and informative.

Dr. Randall M. Packard (Ph.D. not M.D.) did a vast amount of research to provide the reader with a daunting scenario - that malaria is a disease on the rise within the world and worse than that it has returned with a vengeance! The author writes an authoritative and masterful book capturing a great deal of information although he modestly adds "a short history of malaria" on the title page of his book. The fact is, malaria is a *global* disease which although confined *mostly* to the tropics, has also developed elsewhere in northern climates when the conditions are right. The author captures the reader's attention from the first chapter by providing three global narratives which illustrate the complex factors involved in why malaria persists as a worldwide menacing disease. The first example illustrates how changing agricultural and economic factors in Archangel, a northern port city of Russia, about 125 miles from the Arctic Circle, in the 1920s, created the conditions for an unlikely tropical disease to strike a population not considered at risk. Due to the Russian Revolution, farming techniques changed with a vast decrease in production. There were meager food reserves and live stock was scarce. The Bolsheviks confiscated produce or destroyed much of the previous harvest and animals. Factories closed, shipping was halted and famine arose. First there was a drought followed by a flood. The conditions were ripe for the local species of anopheles mosquito to breed. A Western blockade of shipping prevented the poverty stricken starving people from obtaining quinine, the only medicine known to be effective against malaria. A local epidemic arose which was part of a larger regional epidemic hitting Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Volga Regions.

The second example of an epidemic occurred in the 19th century when the British changed the flow of a river in Bengal for rice production. Dams were created for irrigation but they also caused water stagnation which previously was washed or flushed out. The breeding grounds for the local anopheles mosquito arose and malaria became an epidemic in Bengal. Soil eroded due to lack of silt deposits and the land was abandoned by local farmers which resulted in further deterioration and increased the spread of malaria ... Lastly, in 2003 in Palm Beach, Florida there were eight cases of malaria diagnosed. Palm Beach county had a large number of drainage ditches and canals, prime areas for the Anopheles Quadrimaculatus mosquito to breed. The Center for Disease Control speculates that a migrant worker from Central America or South America may have entered the area to work who was a carrier of malaria ... In other words, even affluent areas are not exempt from developing this potentially deadly disease. From this book the reader learns that several criteria must be met for malaria to arise within a population. These are: first a species of the Anopheles mosquito must be present to breed within stagnant waters. Next the mosquito must inject its sporozoites into the bloodstream of an animal or human. After this, the complex life cycle of the malaria parasite continues and the population develops symptoms of the disease which spreads most easily among the malnourished and poor, who are more likely to go untreated, suffer the most and often die. It is of paramount importance to clean areas where dirty water stagnates and it is important to eradicate the anopheles mosquito species within the region ... As the author so clearly points out, when there was a world wide health initiative to rid the disease of malaria from among all nations, rich and poor alike, the disease went on a decline. When the United Nations World Health Organization created health initiatives and used DDT to spray and kill mosquitoes and made quinine or its derivatives available (at low cost) to at risk populations, the disease declined world wide. Also, making insecticide treated bed netting available in Africa has reduced the spread of this disease and improved the lives of these high-risk populations. The author clearly points out how poverty is a high risk factor for getting malaria ... whether one lives in Italy at the turn of the century, in Brazil in the recent, past and current times, or in Thailand where changing economic conditions force farmers to become gemstone miners, smugglers or drug runners and place them at much higher risk. It is quite evident, malaria as a disease is on the rise throughout the world. While there is much hope to save more lives with the development of a vaccine, unfortunately a vaccine can not stop the parasite's ability to eventually develop immunity to new discoveries and treatments. Overall, this is a most excellent book which sounds like it could be dry and boring but surprisingly turns out to be a very enjoyable reading experience. Note: anyone interested in this topic should refer to the July 2007 National Geographic Magazine (Vol. 21. No. 1) article entitled "MALARIA: Stopping a Global

Killer." Erika Borsos [pepper flower]

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